I recently attended a workshop on building resilience in children and adolescents. In particular one speaker Professor Paula Barrett presented a workshop with some very helpful hints to build resilience in our children.

The protective factors that help towards building resilience are, attachment to parents at birth and early childhood, cognitive style of parents (positive thinking skills about self and others including the environment), family, sleep, diet and exercise and lastly evidence based prevention programs. The main principles to help towards building resilience are:

1. Sleep – lack of sleep affects:
   a. Immune system
   b. Brain development
   c. School/work performance
   d. Athletic performance
   e. Irritability
   f. Anxiety/depression
   g. Behaviour in response to stress.

   Sleep routines:
   a. One hour before bedtime – reduce stimulation - avoid lights, excitement, computer, games, TV
   b. Focus on relaxing
   c. Take a warm bath
   d. When in bed, read something relaxing or listen to quiet music.

   How much sleep:
   a. 12 Months old – 14.5 hours
   b. 2 years old – 13 hours
   c. 5 years old – 11 hours
   d. 10 years old – 10 hours
   e. 16 years old – 9.25 hours
   f. Adults 8 to 9 hours min.

2. DIET
   a. Over time we develop strong dietary habits, resulting in ‘physiological settings’
   b. 2 Major goals: reduce sugars and switch from whites to browns.
   c. We need to combine diet with exercise

   DIETARY RECOMMENDATIONS
   d. Mornings: reduce white breads as too many fast releasing sugars
   e. During the day eat a variety of nutritious foods
   f. Evening: reduce sugars, calcium and magnesium induce relaxation (bananas in yoghurt).

3. ROUTINES
   a. All children need routines and rituals
   b. 3 Major reasons – Emotional containment, controllability and predictability.

   IDEAL ROUTINE
   c. Before school: breakfast, getting self ready, relaxing time
d. After school: take to park for afternoon tea and fun time and then homework

  e. Family dinner: talk about day (positives and challenges). No TV or phones.

  f. Night: quiet time, relaxing, sleep routine.

Children thrive on routines. If parents find it difficult to implement a routine they will find it even more difficult to implement a behavior plan. It is helpful to be flexible in routines. Routines must involve some form of exercise.

4. REST AND QUIET TIME
   a. Periods of time with low stimulation – spend time in quiet, calm places
   b. Include relaxation, self soothing and self-regulation activities
   c. Increased quiet time = less need to use time out
   d. Quiet time after school improves productivity and quality of work
   e. Important for parents and teachers to model rest and quiet time.

5. DEVELOPMENTAL READINESS
   a. Society often has unrealistic expectations about what children can or should be doing.
   b. Children can be stressed and overworked from an early age

DEVELOPMENT TASKS
   c. We must consider: gender, culture and learning issues
   d. Cognitive: differences in verbal and maths
   e. Motor: boys are ahead on gross motor skills, (boys are better at doing things) and girls are ahead on fine motor skills
   f. Social and emotional development: boys are typically 2 years behind girls.

6. PARENTING SKILLS (COHESION AND CONSISTENCY)
   a. Cohesion: either decide from the start to divide tasks and back each other or rule jointly and compromise on everything
   b. Parents need to maintain a united front with the children
   c. Cohesion across authority systems (e.g. family, work, school, etc) and be a role model to your children
   d. Consistency: (at least 60% of the time) – what you decide on Monday must be the same as your decision on Friday
   e. Decide on 4-5 key rules
   f. 2-3 compulsory family times.

g.

7. PARENTAL HAPPINESS
   a. “Get a life"
   b. 3 times: family time + couple time + alone time
   c. Family time – Good quality family time including time for fun together
   d. Couple time - have fun and quality time for relationship (regular dates)
   e. Alone time – cultivate friendships and interests outside the marriage; follow your passion
   f. You are a role model for your child – they will learn about life from you.

I have included information on workshops Professor Barrett and her staff conduct in Brisbane for children and parents. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to discuss any of the information contained in this article.

Beryl Wetwood
College Counsellor
PH:  54558600
Wetwoodb@gslc.qld.edu.au